United Nations A/HRC/31/NGO/117

General Assembly

Distr.: General
19 February 2016

English only

Human Rights Council
Thirty-first session
Agenda item 2
Annual report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and reports of the Office of the High Commissioner and the Secretary-General

Written statement* submitted by the Arab NGO Network for Development, a non-governmental organization on the roster

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[15 February 2016]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

GE.16-02549(E)

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The state of human rights in Bahrain

During the 30th Human Rights Council session a joint statement by 33 member states raised the concerns of international community regarding the human rights abuses in Bahrain. This latest joint statement became the 5th issued in the HRC since 2012 that highlighted restrictive and oppressive Government acts in Bahrain.

Similarly, on February 6th, 2016 the text adopted at the European Parliament urged the Bahraini government to implement all the recommendations in the BICI report and the Universal Periodic Review, to put an end to all human rights abuses and to respect human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the freedom of expression, both online and offline, and the freedom of assembly, in line with Bahrain's international human rights obligations. The restrictions on freedom of expression and opinion were tackled in both statements, calling for an immediate and unconditional release of all prisoners of conscience, political activists, journalists, human rights defenders and peaceful protesters, including Nabeel Rajab, Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja, Ibrahim Sharif, Naji Fateel, and Zainab Al-Khawaja.

Bahrain has been witnessing unrest since 14 February 2011 that reflects the violations on human rights including political and civil, economic and social levels. The government has undermined legitimate political process, by curtailing functioning of the political societies, and arresting its leaders, cadres and many followers. It has curtailed the functioning of the civil society by dissolving some, suspending elected boards and imposing its own, depriving sponsorship and imposing many restrictions. Restrictions on the freedom of expression prevails, expression of opinion or criticism is harshly penalized where a tweet led to 5 years of prison sentence to Mr Fadel Abas. Zainab Al Kawaja is another exemplary of human rights defender, being victimized for mere practice of freedom of expression. Freedom of assembly has been curtailed, where all request for open assembly and demonstrations has been terminated since October 2014.Even limited assembly within the premise of political societies is not tolerated. Leading political figures and participants in solidarity meeting with imprisoned Sh. Ali Salman, on 28 December 2015 , were prosecuted, on the pretext of instigating hatred against the state; a charge customary for wide range of state criticism. Bahraini political and rights activists, some in exile, but majority in Bahrain, have their citizenship revoked, and eventually their off-spring. While the cases amount to 257, for those revoked citizenship, residency in their homeland is illegal, thus could be deported and the confiscation of their identification documents makes them virtually dead. Furthermore, sectarian and discriminative policies persist, including through underrepresentation at medium and high level of official administration, denial of employment in security sector and hindering promotion.

In this context, despite the call of international community and despite its human rights obligations deriving from its Constitution, international human rights treaties, Bahrain, instead of a negotiated political statement, continues to implement repressive policies resulting in severe human rights violations on the ground. ANND and BHRO call UN member states to address human rights situation in Bahrain in a special session and urge Bahraini government to enhance its cooperation with the Human Rights Council, the Special procedures and the treaty bodies and to implement recommendations received during its first and second cycle Universal Periodic Review.

Bahrain Human Rights Observatory, an NGO without consultative status, also shares the views expressed in this statement.